

# Grant Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation and Open Space

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*Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature.  
It will never fail you.*

—Frank Lloyd Wright



*Clinch River in Russell County. DCR photo by Irvine Wilson.*

The challenge today, as in the past, is to secure the necessary funding resources that will provide Virginians with opportunities for wholesome outdoor recreational experiences and conserve significant open space resources. In order to achieve this, public recreation and open space resources must compete for available grants sources for funding to meet its goals. This chapter discusses grant opportunities only. For information on the General Obligation Bond or General Fund Appropriation process used by the State and many localities to fund projects refer to Chapter IX: Resource Agencies. State Parks.

## Findings

- Most funding programs are reimbursement programs requiring a matching funding source.
- Funding for the outdoors is historically inconsistent.
- Federal grants are the most prevalent form of funding assistance available in Virginia.
- Other funding sources are available, but are difficult to locate.
- Many grant recipients have difficulty in completing projects within the required time frame. Grant projects not completed on time, which require extensions, jeopardize future funding for the given program.

## Recommendations

- Virginia should restore funds for the matching grant program, the Virginia Outdoors Fund, for acquisition of open space and development of outdoor recreation facilities.
- Localities should establish funding for the planning, acquisition and development of outdoor recreation facilities.
- Unless grant requests are to fund planning and programming, potential grantees should be beyond the conceptual stage. Planning and construction documents should be completed before submitting grant applications.
- Grant requests involving land acquisition, either by fee simple or easement, need to show a firm commitment from the buyer for land acquisition.
- Federally funded assistance programs should be supported by local and state agencies.

- A Commonwealth of Virginia searchable grant website should be created to provide information on federal and state funded grant opportunities. The website could be organized according to Secretariat, and links provided where overlaps exist.



Appomattox Park. Photo by David Garrett.

## History of the Virginia Outdoors Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 1965, Congress created the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for the purpose of funding land acquisitions for public use. The LWCF program has two components: a federal side and a state side. The federal side supports land acquisitions by the National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA), the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The state side is a 50 percent matching reimbursement program for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas that will be maintained in perpetuity. Eligible fund recipients include cities, towns, counties, Native American tribes and state agencies. In 1966, the Commonwealth created the Virginia Commission of Outdoor Recreation, which was responsible for outdoor recreation planning and administration of the LWCF. At that time, federal funds were supplemented with state appropriations and the Virginia Outdoors Fund was established ([www.dcr.virginia.gov/pr/vof.htm](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/pr/vof.htm)).

From 1966 to 1982, the Virginia Outdoors Fund was responsible for distributing approximately \$100 million in grants for state, regional and local parks. By 1983, federal and state funding for the Virginia Outdoors Fund had diminished, and the General Assembly of Virginia dissolved the Commission of Outdoor

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**Table VI-1. Land and Water Conservation Fund Accomplishments in 2006**

National Program Goal	Performance Goal	Performance Measure	National Success	Virginia Success
1. Meet identified outdoor recreation resources needs to strengthen the health and vitality of the American people.	1. Increase quantity of outdoor recreation resources for public use.	Number of new parks created for outdoor recreation.	62 new parks	1 new park
		Number of new acres of land and water made available for outdoor recreation.	19,427 acres	73 new acres
		Number of parks where new outdoor recreation facilities were developed.	261 parks	5 parks
	2. Enhance the quality of outdoor recreation resources for public use.	Number of parks enhanced through new development or rehabilitation of outdoor recreation and support facilities.	373 parks	6 parks
	3. Ensure close to home public outdoor recreation resources.	Number of jurisdictions where LWCF grant projects are located.	399 jurisdictions assisted in 2006.	7 jurisdictions assisted in 2006. One park is multi-jurisdictional.
2. Increase the number of protected outdoor recreation resources and ensure their availability for public use in perpetuity.	4. Increase the number of acres of protected outdoor recreation resources for public use.	Number of new acres protected.	34,635 acres	116 acres
		Number of new sites protected under the LWCF Program.	3,323 sites	3 sites
	5. Ensure that outdoor recreation resources funded through the LWCF are retained and used for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.	Number of LWCF projects inspected and determined to be open for public outdoor recreation.	2,452 projects	23 projects
		Percent of inspected acres funded by the LWCF determined to be open for public outdoor recreation.	100 percent of inspected areas.	100 percent of inspected areas.
3. Encourage sound planning and long-term partnerships to expand the quantity and ensure the quality of needed state and local outdoor recreation resources.	6. Stimulate initiatives to identify outdoor recreation needs and implement strategies to meet them.	Number of approved Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP).	54 plans	Only one SCORP per state. The 2007 <i>Virginia Outdoors Plan</i> is the current state SCORP.
		Number of SCORPs updated in 2005.	1 plan updated	
		Number of projects that exceed the 50 percent non-federal match.	45 projects	5 projects

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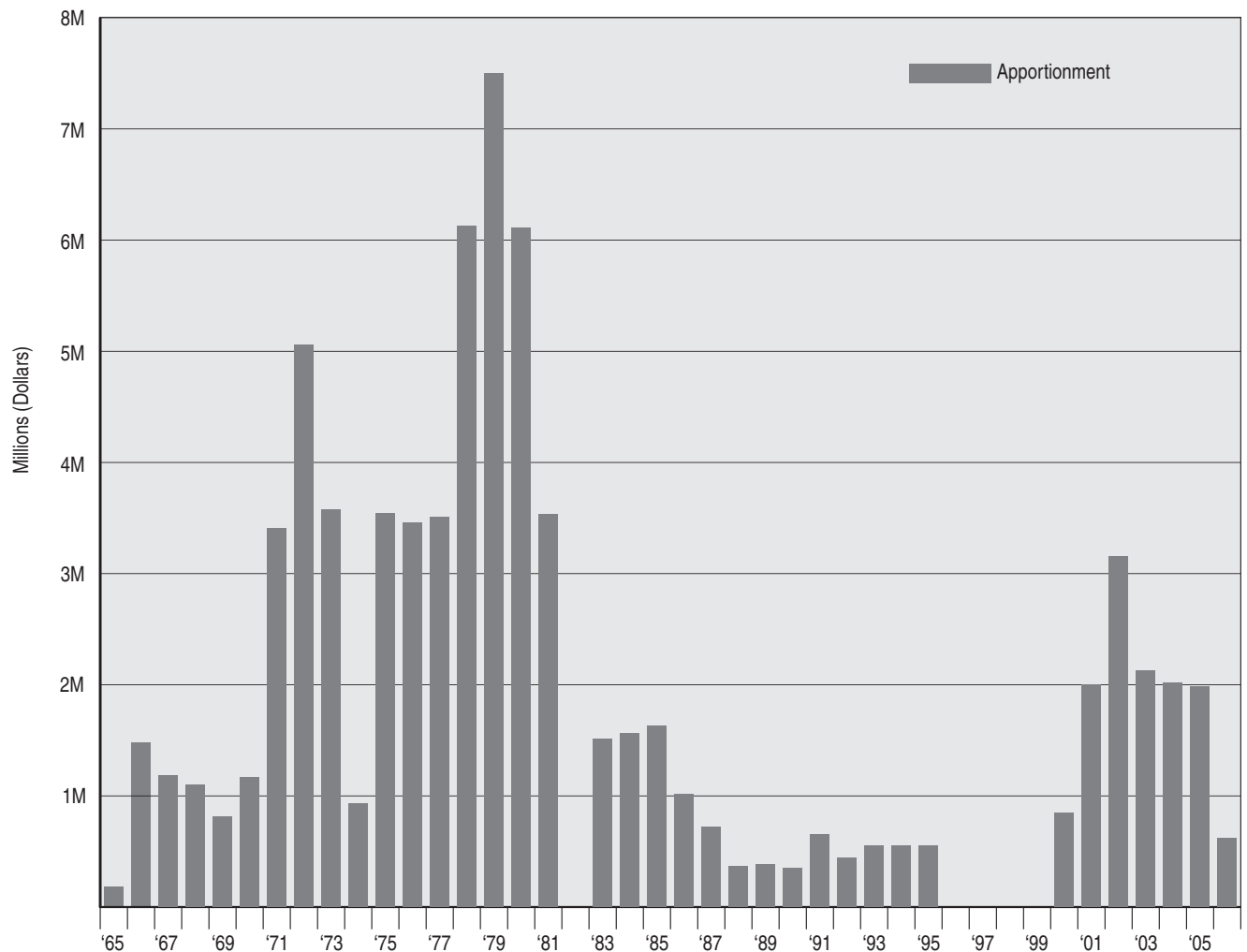
Recreation. The responsibilities for statewide outdoor recreation planning and grant assistance were then transferred to the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Between 1984 and 1987, state appropriations for the Virginia Outdoors Fund were significantly reduced, and the program would not have survived had it not been for the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program.

Concern about lack of funding for the Virginia Outdoors Fund prompted the General Assembly to appropriate \$4.2 million in the 1988 to 1990 biennium. However, an economic downfall occurred in Virginia, and these funds were rescinded. Since then, there have been no dedicated state appropriations for recreation in Virginia, and the Virginia Outdoors Fund Program has been funded entirely with federal LWCF “pass through” dollars. Unfortunately, the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program was not funded from 1995 to 1999. In fiscal year 2000, the federal LWCF Program received renewed appropriations from

Congress, and the Virginia Outdoors Fund was revived with \$850,000 for grants. For fiscal years 2001-2005, Virginia’s annual apportionment was \$2 million dollars.

In 2003, the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) evaluated the performance of the state side LWCF. One reason for the review was the unexpended balance remaining on the books due to approved projects not being completed in a timely fashion. In its review, the OMB analyzed the purpose of the LWCF and its national relevance. The OMB concluded that the program lacked an appropriate process for measuring performance and could not adequately show national program accomplishments. In response, NPS, in collaboration with a team of state partners and constituent groups, developed three national program goals and seven performance goals that define the core purposes and mission of the state side LWCF. Thirteen performance measures were established to summarize key accomplishments.

**Figure VI-1. Land & Water Conservation Fund Apportionments by Year**



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For fiscal year 2006, the president proposed zero funding for the state side LWCF. However, through the 2006 Interior Appropriations Act (Public Law 109-55), Congress restored funding to the program by allocating \$27,994,976 for state and territory grants. Virginia's share of this allocation is \$615,971. For fiscal year 2007, the president again proposed zero funding for the state side LWCF. Hopefully, funding will again be restored by Congress.

Despite erratic funding over its 41-year history, the state side LWCF has been responsible for 40,400 projects nationally. In Virginia, LWCF has made more than 405 recreation projects possible in 117 localities.

A key component of the LWCF program is the requirement that any lands acquired or facilities developed with these monies be maintained in perpetuity for the purposes for which they were acquired or constructed. Section 6(f)(3) of the Land and Water Conservation Act clearly states that grant-assisted areas are to remain forever available for "public outdoor recreation use," or be replaced by lands of equal market value and viable recreation usefulness. Thus, the LWCF is, in fact, the most powerful piece of land conservation legislation in the nation.

### Other government-funded recreational assistance programs

#### Virginia Recreational Trails Program

[www.dcr.virginia.gov/prr/trailfnd.htm](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/prr/trailfnd.htm)

While the LWCF program is the premiere funding program for recreation facilities in Virginia, other funding programs aid in the creation of recreational opportunities. One of the most popular is the National Recreational Trail Program, known in Virginia as the Virginia Recreational Trails Program. This program, administered by DCR in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), offers 80 percent grants for the development and rehabilitation of trails and trail facilities for both motorized and non-motorized recreational trail users. Eligible fund recipients include private, nonprofit trail organizations, and city, town or county governments. Federal government entities may also be eligible to participate if teamed with private, nonprofit trail groups and organizations. A minimum of 30 percent of annual funding must be used for motorized recreational trail uses, 30 percent for non-motorized recreational trail uses, and the remaining 40 percent is discretionary in that it can be used for any type of trail project. However, preference



Fishing Pier at Leesylvania State Park. Photo by DCR.

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must be given to projects with the greatest number of compatible recreational purposes, provide for innovative recreational trails corridor sharing, or both. In Virginia, this program has made 194 trail projects possible in 109 localities.

On August 10, 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) transportation bill was signed replacing the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21). This bill will provide annual apportionments for the Recreational Trails Program through fiscal year 2009.



*Austin Tunnel along the New River Trail State Park. Photo by DCR.*

### Transportation Enhancement Program

[www.virginiadot.org/projects/pr-enhance.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/pr-enhance.asp)

SAFETEA-LU is also the funding source for the Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program. The Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program is administered by the Virginia Department of Transportation. The TE program funds 12 categories of transportation-related community projects. Two categories include the conversion of abandoned railway corridors into recreational trails, and the development of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Transportation enhancement activities can be stand-alone projects or can be implemented as part of larger transportation projects. In either case, the TE must relate to the intermodal surface transportation system in function, proximity or impact. Historically, trails and bicycle-pedestrian facilities have accounted for about one-half of all TE funding.

### Recreational Access Roads Program

[www.virginiadot.org/business/resources/localassistance-recreationalaccessguide.pdf](http://www.virginiadot.org/business/resources/localassistance-recreationalaccessguide.pdf)

VDOT also administers the Recreational Access Roads Program. This program provides state funds for construction of recreational access roads to public

recreational areas. Proposals must include verification from the director of DCR that the area is a public recreation area, and recommendation from DCR that the Recreational Access Program funds be used at the facility. Project costs must be limited to the maximum project allocation amount as specified by Section 33.1-223 of the Code of Virginia governing the use of these funds. The Commonwealth Transportation Board has set the maximum funding limit for the program at \$3 million per year.

### Federal Lands to Parks Program

[www.nps.gov/flp](http://www.nps.gov/flp)

In addition to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, NPS administers the Federal Lands to Parks Program. This program serves to transfer surplus federal real property to state or local governments for public parks and recreation use. Applications for receiving the transfer property are submitted to the NPS Regional Federal Lands to Parks Program offices. Land transfers under this program are usually conveyed at no cost in return for the benefits derived by its public use. However, the applicant must incur the cost of grant application preparation, required land surveys, title searches, and site development and management plans. After approval and transfer of the land, NPS monitors the use of the property and development to ensure management in accordance with the terms and conditions of the deed provisions and approved management plan. A requirement of this program is that facilities must be maintained in perpetuity for public parks and recreation. In Virginia, 38 sites in 24 localities have been transferred into recreation use through this program.

### Virginia Saltwater Recreation Fishing Development Fund

[www.mrc.virginia.gov/vsrfdf](http://www.mrc.virginia.gov/vsrfdf)

Funded through the collection of fees for saltwater fishing licenses, the Virginia Saltwater Recreation Fishing Development Fund provides funds to improve recreational fisheries in Virginia. Administered by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), this matching reimbursement program provides funding for water-access facility development, habitat improvement, education and law enforcement. For water-access facility projects, grant recipients are required to provide a hard dollar (cash or land) matching contribution at a minimum of 25 percent of total project cost. In addition, facilities funded through this program must be available for public use for a minimum of 20 years. The program has two funding cycles during the year: Cycle I- January through May and Cycle II-July through October.

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*Shenandoah Valley sinkhole pond. DCR photo by Irvine Wilson.*

### Government funding for open space and the outdoors

Whether federally or state supported, locating funding sources for special open space and outdoor projects is difficult. Websites such as Grants.Gov ([www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)) and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance website (<http://12.46.245.173/cfda/cfda.html>) may be helpful. However, these national websites may not direct potential grant recipients to the state agency or program administrator. It would be enormously useful to the citizens of the Commonwealth if Virginia created its own searchable grant website, which listed available funding assistance programs for recreation, conservation, community development, education, transportation, water quality, or housing, etc. A Virginia grants website could be grouped according to Secretariat, and links provided where overlaps exist.

In keeping with the theme of the 2007 *Virginia Outdoors Plan*, and to the extent practicable, a sample of federal and state funding programs is listed below that may be useful in planning for open space, greenways, natural areas, environmental protection, historic preservation, land conservation and sustainable communities.

#### The Virginia Land Conservation Fund

[www.dcr.virginia.gov/vlcf/index.htm](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/vlcf/index.htm)

The Virginia Land Conservation Fund (VLCF) is a state-funded, 50 percent matching reimbursement program providing for the establishment of permanent conservation easements. It also funds the purchase of open space and park areas, natural areas, historic areas, farmland and forest lands for preservation in perpetuity. The program is a cooperative effort of the

DCR, DOF, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Department of Historic Resources (DHR). State agencies, local governments, public bodies and registered (tax-exempt) nonprofit groups are eligible to receive matching grants through this program.

Available annual appropriations are divided equally among each of the project categories. Established in 1999, appropriations for this program have allowed four funding cycles. Those cycles have resulted in the approval of 67 projects that have resulted in the acquisition and protection of 20,266.49 land acres.

#### Open Space Lands Preservation Trust Fund

[www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/ptf.html](http://www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/ptf.html)

Administered by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Open Space Lands Preservation Trust Fund was created by the General Assembly to assist landowners with the costs of conveying conservation easements and the purchase of all or part of the value of the easements. Conservation easements preserve farmland, forestland, natural and recreational areas by restricting intensive uses, such as development and mining, which would alter the conservation values of the land. To be eligible for assistance, the easements must be perpetual in duration. Activities that qualify for reimbursement include the cost of appraisals, legal costs, and all or part of the value of the easement. Applications seeking only reimbursement of costs, demonstrating financial need, or covering a family owned or operated farm are given priority.

#### Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program and the State Wildlife Grants Program

[www.dgif.virginia.gov](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov)

Two programs administered by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) are the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program and the State Wildlife Grants Program. These are used for the direct acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation. The funds may be used statewide and require a non-federal match between 25 percent and 50 percent. Annual funding for the program is provided through the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Virginia's share for the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program averages around \$9 million per year, while the State Wildlife Grants Program averages \$1.2 million annually. Recent examples of acquisitions made with these funds include the Cavalier Wildlife Management Area, the Feather Fin Wildlife Management Area, the Big Survey Wildlife Management Area and the Horsehoe Bend Boat Landing.

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### Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Grants

[www.dof.virginia.gov/urban/resources/2006-05-12-UCF-Grant-RFP.doc](http://www.dof.virginia.gov/urban/resources/2006-05-12-UCF-Grant-RFP.doc)

The Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) and “Trees Virginia,” in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, administer the Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Grant Assistance Program. This program is designed to encourage projects that promote tree planting, the care of trees, the protection and enhancement of urban and community forest ecosystems, and education on tree issues in cities, towns and communities across the nation. Grants are awarded through this program to encourage local government and citizen involvement in creating and supporting long-term and sustained urban and community forestry projects and programs at the local level.

Eligible recipients include state agencies, local and regional units of government, approved nonprofit organizations 501(c)(3), neighborhood associations, civic groups, public educational institutions (college level) and community tree volunteer groups. Projects are divided among seven categories: planning, nonprofit organization support, support of local government urban and community forestry programs, education, research, demonstration projects and miscellaneous. Under the planning category, projects related to the planning and development of community greenways are eligible for funding. For those projects, funding may be applied to corridor and resource assessment, feasibility studies, maps and drawings, promotional and educational materials, and organizational development and staffing.

### The Forest Legacy Program

[www.dof.virginia.gov/mgt/index-flp.shtml](http://www.dof.virginia.gov/mgt/index-flp.shtml)

The Forest Legacy Program assists in the acquisition of forestlands or conservation easements from private landowners who are willing to donate or sell their land for preservation as forests in perpetuity. The USDA Forest Service delivers program funding and provides guidance to states. In Virginia, the FLP is administered by DOF, which completed all program participation requirements in 2000.

Virginia's FLP emphasizes environmentally important working forests, and greater credit is given those proposals emphasizing the working forest concept. Working forests are those which encompass all of the benefits healthy forests provide, for example, cleansing air, purifying water, providing products, serving as wildlife habitat and fostering recreational opportunities.

All areas of Virginia are eligible for FLP projects. Proposals must meet one or more of the following eligibility criteria to be considered: working forests threatened by conversion to non-forest use, conserving timber production capabilities, protecting habitat for threatened and endangered species, serving as a buffer for riparian protection, preserving historic and cultural resources, and encouraging preservation of scenic vistas.

Proposals for the FLP must involve tracts of land that are at least 20 acres in size, have a Forest Resource Plan or Multi-Resource Management Plan for the tract, are covered by at least 80 percent forest, and have a willing owner who agrees to a perpetual easement and allows annual monitoring, or is willing to sell the fee simple title to the tract.

The FLP funds up to 75 percent of acquisition cost for fee simple or easement purchases. The remaining 25 percent of the funds must be provided by non-federal sources.



*Calcareous woodland. DCR photo by Irvine Wilson.*

### Virginia Landowner Incentive Program

[www.dgif.virginia.gov](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov)

DGIF administers the Virginia Landowner Incentive Program. The program focuses on the restoration of riparian and instream habitats on private lands in watersheds that support species of greatest conservation need, which are identified in the Virginia Wildlife Action Plan. The target areas currently include the Upper Tennessee River, lower New River, upper Roanoke River and upper James River watersheds. Funding for the program comes from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. DGIF currently has an award of \$1.2 million for riparian and instream restoration and is able to offer landowners up to 75 percent reimbursement on project costs.



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### **Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (Section 6 Funds)**

[www.fws.gov/endangered/grants/section6/index.html](http://www.fws.gov/endangered/grants/section6/index.html)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act, provides funds to states and territories for species and habitat conservation. In 2006, four grant types were made possible through this fund: Conservation Grants, Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grants, Habitat Conservation Land Acquisition Grants and Recovery Land Acquisition Grants.

**Conservation Grants** provide funding for the conservation of listed species and at-risk listed species. Eligible projects include habitat restoration, species status surveys, public education, outreach, captive propagation and re-introduction, nesting surveys and management plan development.

**Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grants** serve to aid in supporting the development of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP). Eligible activities include baseline surveys, inventories, document preparation, outreach and similar habitat conservation planning activities.

**HCP Land Acquisition Grants** provide funding to acquire land associated with approved HCPs. These funds do not fund mitigation required of an HCP permittee but rather support conservation actions by state or local governments that complement mitigation.

**Recovery Land Acquisition Grants** provide funding for the acquisition of habitat for endangered and threatened species in support of approved recovery plans.

States and territories must contribute a minimum of 25 percent of the estimated cost of approved projects. The 25 percent must be from non-federal sources.

### **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program**

[www.dof.virginia.gov/mgt/cip-index-whip.shtml](http://www.dof.virginia.gov/mgt/cip-index-whip.shtml)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program, which offers private landowners cost-sharing to install practices to improve wildlife habitat. The program is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Current participation in a USDA program is not a requirement; however, legal ownership of the land is required.

Funds are available to private landowners, private companies, sporting groups, hunt clubs, environmental and conservation organizations and others.

The WHIP provides up to 75 percent cost-sharing for installation of practices, \$10,000 maximum cost-share per applicant, 10-year contracts and maintenance agreements. Eligible activities include disking, prescribed burning, mowing, planting habitat, converting fescue to warm season grasses, establishing riparian buffers, creating habitat for waterfowl, and installing filter strips, field borders and hedgerows.

### **State and Tribal Wildlife Grant**

The State and Tribal Wildlife Grant program assists state fish and wildlife agencies and federally recognized tribes in the development and implementation of activities that benefit wildlife, including species that are not hunted or fished. In Virginia the funds are made available through DGIF. All activities that meet these criteria are eligible for funding. Consistent with the law, priority for use of these funds should be placed on those species with the greatest conservation need, taking into consideration the relative level of funding available for the conservation of those species.

For Virginia-related information and success stories accomplished through this program by DGIF, please visit the Teaming with Wildlife website at [www.teaming.com/state\\_pages/virginia\\_cwcs.htm](http://www.teaming.com/state_pages/virginia_cwcs.htm).

### **Federal Coastal Zone Management Act Funds**

[www.deq.state.va.us/coastal/funding.html#Funding percent20Eligibility](http://www.deq.state.va.us/coastal/funding.html#Fundingpercent20Eligibility)

Federal Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) funds are available on an annual basis to the Virginia Coastal Program's partners (state agencies, planning district commissions and local governments) for implementation of the program. Financial assistance grants, under sections 306, 306A, 308, 309, and 6217 of the CZMA, provide Virginia with the means to carry out its goals of effective protection and careful development of its coastal areas. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) administers the federal funds based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) continuing approval. An annual grant application is submitted by the administering agency to NOAA in June of each year. Upon NOAA's approval of this application, the Virginia Coastal Program grant cycle begins in October of that same year and runs through September 30 the following year. Funding assistance through the Section 306A of the CZMA aids in the acquisition of fee simple and easement interests in land, low-cost public access improvement construction projects, or habitat restoration projects. Section 306A funding must be matched dollar by dollar with nonfederal fund sources.

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### **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**

[www.dcr.virginia.gov/sw/crep.htm](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/sw/crep.htm)

Administered by DCR, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program aims to improve Virginia's water quality and wildlife habitat by offering financial incentives, cost-share and rental payments to farmers who voluntarily restore riparian buffers, filter strips and wetlands through the installation of approved conservation practices. CREP is an enhancement to the federal Conservation Reserve Program.

CREP is divided into two regions. The Chesapeake Bay region targets Virginia's entire bay watershed and allows for the planting of riparian buffer, filter strips and wetland restoration. The Southern Rivers region targets the same activities in watersheds outside the bay drainage basin.

State cost-share payments are administered through local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) offices. The state reimburses up to 25 percent of conservation practice costs deemed eligible by the local soil and water conservation district. Reimbursement is limited to a maximum of \$300 per acre of restored buffer or wetland. There is also a 25 percent state income tax credit for out-of-pocket expenses. Federal reimbursement is made through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for up to 50 percent of a participant's eligible expenses for implementing best management practices (BMP), such as fencing or alternative watering systems. Additional incentives are available for projects within the Chesapeake Bay region that involve restoration of riparian forest buffers.

In addition to financial incentives, cost-share and rental payments, the program offers the option of a permanent easement being recorded with the deed. DCR will make a one-time payment of up to \$500 per acre for the recordation of permanent open space easements. This option is available to participants in the program after completing the installation of conservation practices. The easements serve to restrict development, and enable the landowner to ensure, in perpetuity, their desire to protect water quality and wildlife habitat.

### **Virginia Water Quality Improvement Fund**

[www.dcr.virginia.gov/sw/wqia.htm](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/sw/wqia.htm)

The purpose of the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) is to provide water quality improvement grants to local governments, soil and water conservation districts, and individuals for point and nonpoint source pollution prevention, reduction and control. Funding is

available in two distinct program regions: the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and the Southern Rivers Watershed.

The WQIF is a state-funded grant program administered by DCR (non-point source grants) and DEQ (point source grants). Program guidelines require a 50 percent match. Federal monies are eligible as match provided they have not been matched to another project, and as long as no policy or procedure of the administering federal agency is being violated.

### **Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program**

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp)

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This program aids farmers and ranchers in keeping their property in agriculture. The program provides matching funding to states, tribes, local governments and non-governmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase perpetual conservation easements or other interests in land.

Eligible land must be all or part of a farm or ranch. Land must contain prime, unique, or other productive soil, or historical or archaeological resources; be included in an offer from a state, tribal or local government or non-government organization's farmland protection program; be privately owned; be covered by a conservation plan for any highly erodible land; be of a size that can sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets for what the land produces; and be owned by an individual or entity that does not exceed the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI).

Recipients of funding agree not to convert their land to non-agricultural uses and to develop and implement a conservation plan for highly erodible properties.

Properties that are already protected through existing deed restrictions or other legal restraints are not eligible for participation in the FRPP.

The NRCS share of the conservation easement cannot exceed 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program and Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program**

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp)

**Wetlands Reserve Program** (WRP) is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The program provides technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water and related natural

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resource concerns on private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost effective manner. The goal of the program is to encourage ranchers and farmers to stop cultivating on lands that were once wetlands and restore them to their greatest wetland function and value with optimum wildlife habitat.

Landowners are given three program participation options: a 10-year restoration cost-share option, a 30-year conservation easement or permanent conservation easements. NRCS provides financial assistance in the form of easement payments and restoration cost-share assistance.

Participants in this program continue to control access, have use of non-developed recreational activities, such as hunting and fishing, and maintain the right to lease the recreational use of their land for financial gain.

**Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP)** is administered under the WRP and uses existing authority to enhance the delivery of WRP. Specifically, WREP provides an avenue for NRCS to form special partnerships with others to improve or expand the delivery of WRP, including, but not limited to, easement acquisition and activities associated with wetland restoration, creation or enhancement.

WREP does not alter the nature of WRP. The emphasis of WREP is restoring and protecting habitat for migratory birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife. Like WRP, landowners continue to have the opportunity to enroll land under a permanent easement, a 30-year easement, or restoration cost-share agreements. However, a WREP proposal may provide for emphasizing one enrollment type or another, such as increasing the utilization of 30-year WRP easements in a particular watershed by the partner purchasing a permanent easement overlay to the 30-year WRP easement, and the landowner receiving full compensation from the combined acquisition.

Funds are made available through a nationwide competitive process. NRCS accepts proposals for single- or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years, from eligible entities including federally recognized Indian tribes, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals. Proposals are solicited for multiple-program operations, wetland creation and enhancement on projects enrolled in WRP prior to FY 2006, easement management, and proposals that provide for technical assistance contributions from partners.

NRCS state conservationists submit the top two priority proposals based on state natural resource concerns and technical assistance needs. In making its selections, NRCS emphasizes proposals that provide for significant levels of technical assistance provided by a partner. The proposals may address WRP program delivery; wetland restoration, creation, and enhancement activities; easement management; or a combination of these activities.

### **North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grants (NAWCA)**

NAWCA provides matching grants to organizations and individuals who have developed partnerships to carry out wetlands conservation projects in the United States, Canada and Mexico for the benefit of wetlands-associated migratory birds and other wildlife.

Two types of grants programs are offered through the NAWCA: the Standard Grant Program and the Small Grant program. Both programs require a dollar for dollar match by the sponsor, which must be from non-federal sources.

The **Standard Grant Program** is a competitive grant program that supports public-private partnerships carrying out projects in Canada, the United States and Mexico. These projects must involve long-term protection, restoration, or enhancement of wetlands and associated uplands habitats. Applicants submit project proposals to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Division of Bird Habitat Conservation ([www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/index.shtml](http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/index.shtml)). After a preliminary review, the applications are ranked and recommend projects are given to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission for final funding approval. The division is responsible for administering the grants for the approved projects.

The **Small Grant Program** supports the same type of projects and adheres to the same selection criteria and administrative guidelines as the U.S. Standard Grants Program. However, project activities are usually smaller in scope and involve fewer project dollars. Grant requests may not exceed \$75,000, and funding priority is given to grantees or partners new to the NAWCA Grants Program.

### **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Grants**

The NFWF conserves healthy populations of fish, wildlife and plants, on land and in the sea, through creative and respectful partnerships, sustainable solutions and better education. The foundation meets

## Grant Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation and Open Space

these goals by awarding matching grants to projects benefiting conservation education, habitat protection and restoration, and natural resource management. Grants offered are of two types: general matching grants and special grants.

The **General Matching Grants** are awarded to projects that address priority actions promoting fish and wildlife conservation and the habitats on which they depend, work proactively to involve other conservation and community interests, leverage foundation-provided funding, and evaluate project outcomes.

Funding sources for NFWF matching grants include federal funds provided by annual congressional appropriations and agreements with federal agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, NOAA, and USDA Forest Service. The foundation also receives and awards contributions from select foundations, corporations and other non-federal entities. This program requires that each federal dollar awarded be leveraged with a non-federal dollar or equivalent goods and services. NFWF requires a 2:1 match.

Grants are awarded on a competitive basis. Eligible grant recipients include all levels of government, tribes, educational institutions and nonprofit conservation organizations. Project proposals are received on a year-round, revolving basis with two decision cycles per year.

The **Special Grants Program** involves numerous funding programs each with specific guidelines and time frames. Examples of some of the Special Grants include the following.

- Acres for America Program aims to conserve important habitat for fish, wildlife and plants through acquisition of interest in real property.
- Bring Back the Natives funds on-the-ground efforts to restore native aquatic species to their historic range.
- Chesapeake Bay Small Watersheds Grants Program provides grants to organizations working on a local level to protect and improve watersheds in the Chesapeake Bay basin, while building citizen-based stewardship.
- Five Star Restoration Grants Program awards funding on a competitive basis to support community-based wetland, riparian and coastal habitat restoration projects that build diverse partnerships and foster local natural resource stewardship through education, outreach and training activities.

- NFWF and BASS Federation Nation, a national volunteer organization, have started a More Fish Partnership Fund. This is a nationwide effort to raise awareness of critical fish and habitat conservation needs and to support local conservation action across the country. Grants between \$10,000 and \$100,000 will be awarded to community groups in support of fish conservation projects, including habitat restoration, water quality improvement, and watershed planning and management.
- The NOAA Marine Debris Program (NOAA MDP) provides grants to organizations working on projects to improve our understanding of the impacts of marine debris on our marine and coastal resources, and to reduce and prevent debris in our marine environment. Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, nonprofits, commercial organizations, and state, local, and tribal governments whose projects have the potential to benefit NOAA trust resources through marine debris research and prevention projects.

Detailed information on both the General Matching Grants and Special Grant Programs through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is available at [www.nfwf.org/programs.cfm](http://www.nfwf.org/programs.cfm).



*Scenic rural landscape in Augusta County. Photo by Nancy Sorrells.*

### Scenic Byway Program Grants

This program recognizes roads having outstanding scenic, historic, cultural, natural, recreational and archaeological qualities. The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) has provisions for providing funds for grants and technical assistance to states and tribes for use on highways designated as National Scenic Byways, All-American Roads, America's Byways, state scenic or Indian tribe scenic byways.

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Federal funding through this program provides 80 percent of the total cost, requiring a 20 percent match from the recipient. Three websites are dedicated to the Scenic Byway Program. For more information on participating in this program please visit [www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/factsheets/scenic.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/factsheets/scenic.htm), [www.virginiadot.org/info/service/prog-byways-ites.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/info/service/prog-byways-ites.asp) and [www.bywaysonline.org](http://www.bywaysonline.org).

### State Historic Preservation Grants

[www.dhr.virginia.gov/State\\_grants/State\\_grants.htm](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/State_grants/State_grants.htm)

This is a matching grant program managed by DHR. Historic Preservation Grants are available to local governments, nonprofit museums, historical organizations, and historic sites that need extra funding for operations, to complete rehabilitations or to maintain collections. The grants are funded by the Virginia General Assembly and make possible the revitalization of key community historic resources. Eligible activities include the rehabilitation, restoration, or renovation work on an eligible building, work to make the building accessible to those with disabilities, and work affecting collections housed in an eligible building owned by historical organizations. The outcome is viable cultural assets that attract tourists, educate citizens about their heritage, and instill a sense of place and cultural identity in communities.

### Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) [www.dhcd.virginia.gov/cd/default.htm](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/cd/default.htm)

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development administers CDBG with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Virginia receives up to \$19 million annually, which is available for community development planning through Planning Grants, and project implementation through Community Improvement Grants (CIG). The objective of this program is to aid in the development of viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for people with low and moderate income.

All projects must meet one of three national objectives: activities benefiting low and moderate income people, activities that aid in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight, and activities designed to meet community needs having a particular urgency. Some of the project specific activities that can be carried out with CDBG funds include acquisition of real property, provision of public facilities and improvements, development of neighborhood centers, neighborhood revitalization and energy conservation projects.

### Certified Local Government Program (CLG) [www.dhr.virginia.gov/clg/clg.htm](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/clg/clg.htm)

The CLG Program was created by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in 1980, and establishes a partnership between local governments, the federal historic preservation program, and DHR. The program allows DHR, as the State Historic Preservation Office, to recommend certification for local governments that have put key elements of a sound local preservation program in place in their communities. CLG grant funds may be used for surveys of architectural or archaeological resources, preparation of National Register of Historic Places nominations, heritage stewardship planning projects (historic preservation plans, archaeological assessments, and preservation components of comprehensive plans), public education programs associated with a heritage stewardship program, and testing of archaeological sites for significance determination.

### Alternatives to government funding for outdoor recreation and open space

In addition to the above-listed funding resources, there are many other resources that can be utilized in helping to achieve recreation and community development needs. Project sponsors should contact local corporations, businesses (grocers, car dealers, development companies) and foundations, which often have community outreach programs willing to contribute funding to community projects.

Three main nonprofit groups dedicated to land conservation include the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy and the Conservation Fund.

### The Trust for Public Land (TPL) ([www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org))

is a national nonprofit organization working to protect land as parks and open space. TPL helps communities and government agencies identify land for protection. It aids in identifying funds that might be used to protect that land, and may sometimes assist in helping to raise needed funds. TPL bridges the needs of landowners seeking to protect a special property, and those of government agencies that acquire land for public benefit. TPL has extensive experience in land transactions and land conservation, making it a powerful partner in land conservation efforts. Except in very specific instances, TPL normally does not award grants. However, TPL can help its partners locate and apply for a grant in conjunction with an ongoing TPL project.

## **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)** ([www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org))

is a conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of plants, animals and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. TNC works with landowners, communities, cooperatives and businesses to establish local groups that can protect land. Some of the tools used include land trusts, conservation easements, private reserves and incentives. TNC also works with conservation supporters and partner organizations to create funding for conservation.

## **The Conservation Fund (TCF)**

([www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org)) is an environmental non-profit dedicated to protecting important landscapes and waterways. Using a partnership driven approach, TCF works to preserve unique natural, cultural and historic places. This group provides conservation services to government agencies, corporations, foundations, nonprofit organizations and individuals. Services include land identification, acquisition, mitigation, disposition, and land advisory and training.

In addition, most federal, state and local agencies dedicated to conservation and recreation offer technical assistance. More information is available in the Land Conservation chapter.

## **Applying for grants**

A successful grant proposal is one that is well-prepared, thoughtfully planned, and clearly and concisely presented. The potential applicant should become familiar with the program criteria related to the funding program from which assistance is being sought. Be aware that the basic requirements, application forms, information and procedures vary from one program and funding agency to another. Therefore, it is important to understand the philosophy and intent of the grant program from which you are seeking funding assistance. Each has its own eligibility, rules, regulations, criteria and compliance requirements that an applicant will need to understand in order to apply for assistance. Thus, it is important to use the applications provided by each grant program and answer all the questions presented, as well as providing all the information the application requests.

Because of the large number of applications received during open grant rounds, many grant reviewers quickly scan text to get an overview of the proposal. They look for how the project will be accomplished, how reasonable the proposal is, and how likely it is to be completed within required time frames. Applications that answer all the key questions and

provide all required information in an easy-to-read, concise manner will be viewed more favorably and have a greater likelihood of funding. Applications with overwhelming, rambling detail often make it difficult to understand the proposal and are likely to score poorly.

A key aspect of any grant application is the budget information. These cost projections reflect how projects will be implemented and managed. In preparing budget costs, it is important to understand the matching requirements of the program and to only include items the grantor would be willing to support. In assessing budgets, reviewers look at whether costs are reasonable for the proposal, and whether there is sufficient budget detail and explanations of budget items that are not cash.

Finally, it is important to understand that most funding programs have limited resources available for award. As such, many beautifully-assembled grant applications meeting the purpose of the given programs may not be funded.

## **Application Do's and Don'ts**

### **Do**

- Understand the program philosophy
- Understand eligibility criteria
- Understand post-completion compliance requirements
- Contact the administering agency with questions
- Follow formatting guidelines
- Be clear and concise
- Submit required number of copies
- Proofread

### **Don't**

- Use jargon
- Submit a generic application
- Overwhelm reviewers with rambling details
- Skip questions on the application
- Wait until the last minute to start